

NCA  
VOC FOR PGM/FN  
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5948  
DOUG ROBERTS/ATHENS

JUNE 27, 1978

THE TWO YEMENS

ANNCR:

IN THE SPACE OF JUST THREE DAYS, THE PRESIDENTS OF BOTH NORTH AND SOUTH YEMEN HAVE BEEN KILLED. PRESIDENT AHMAD HUSSEIN AL-GHASHMI OF NORTH YEMEN DIED IN A BOMB EXPLOSION LAST SATURDAY THAT HIS GOVERNMENT PROMPTLY BLAMED ON SOUTH YEMEN. LESS THAN FORTY-EIGHT HOURS LATER, A SPLIT IN THE SOUTH YEMENI LEADERSHIP ERUPTED INTO A DAY OF HEAVY FIGHTING IN THE CAPITAL, ADEN, AND WHEN IT WAS OVER, PRESIDENT SALIM RUBAY'I ALI AND TWO OF HIS TOP AIDES WERE EXECUTED BY FIRING SQUADS. WITH A BACKGROUND LOOK AT THE TWO YEMEN'S, HERE IS DOUGLAS ROBERTS AT THE VOA MIDDLE EAST BUREAU.

VOICE:

THE FERTILE PLAIN IN PARTS OF BOTH NORTH AND SOUTH YEMEN CONTRASTS SHARPLY WITH THE DESERT THAT COVERS MOST OF THE REST OF THE ARABIAN PENINSULA. IN ANCIENT TIMES, THE TWO YEMENS WERE UNITED IN A SUCCESSION OF THRIVING COMMERCIAL EMPIRES THAT CONTROLLED THE INCENSE TRADE FROM SOUTHWEST ARABIA TO THE MIDDLE EAST AND EUROPE. AT TIMES SINCE THEN, THE TWO STATES HAVE BEEN UNITED, BUT BY THE BEGINNING OF THIS CENTURY, THEY HAD BEEN FORMALLY SPLIT INTO SEPARATE ENTITIES FOLLOWING THE ARRIVAL OF BRITISH AND TURKISH COLONIAL FORCES. NORTH YEMEN EMERGED AS AN INDEPENDENT STATE AFTER WORLD WAR ONE, BUT THE SOUTH REMAINED UNDER BRITISH CONTROL UNTIL NINETEEN SIXTY-SEVEN.

IT WAS AN UPHEAVAL IN THE NORTH THAT SPARKED THE DRIVE FOR INDEPENDENCE IN SOUTH YEMEN. IN NINETEEN SIXTY-TWO, A GROUP OF ARMY OFFICERS STAGED A REVOLT AGAINST NORTH YEMEN'S

FEUDAL LEADER AND PROCLAIMED A REPUBLIC. THE OUSTED LEADER, OR IMAM, ESCAPED TO HIS MOUNTAIN STRONGHOLD, AND AN EIGHT-YEAR CIVIL WAR FOLLOWED WITH EGYPT UNDER THE LATE PRESIDENT NASSER SUPPORTING THE REPUBLICANS AGAINST ROYALIST FORCES BACKED BY SAUDI ARABIA. SELF-STYLED NATIONALISTS IN SOUTH YEMEN RUSHED TO THE AID OF THE NORTH'S REPUBLICAN REGIME, WHILE MANY OF THE SOUTH'S TRIBAL LEADERS SUPPORTED THE ROYALIST SIDE.

A YEAR AFTER THE CIVIL WAR IN THE NORTH BEGAN, A NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT WAS FORMED IN SOUTH YEMEN, AND IT LAUNCHED A GUERRILLA WAR IN THE AREA AGAINST BOTH BRITISH FORCES AND TRIBAL LEADERS. FOUR YEARS LATER, AS THE WAR IN THE NORTH CONTINUED, THE BRITISH GRANTED INDEPENDENCE TO SOUTH YEMEN, AND THE NATIONAL FRONT SOON GAINED CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT.

IN NORTH YEMEN, NEITHER SIDE EMERGED VICTORIOUS, AND IN NINETEEN SEVENTY A COMPROMISE WAS REACHED AND A PEACE AGREEMENT SIGNED. WHILE THE REPUBLIC REMAINED AND THE IMAM WAS NOT ALLOWED TO RETURN, MANY OF HIS SUPPORTERS ENTERED THE NEW COALITION GOVERNMENT.

DESPITE THEIR CLOSE ETHNIC AND TRIBAL LINKS, RELATIONS BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH YEMEN WERE STRAINED RIGHT FROM THE START. THERE WERE BORDER CLASHES IN NINETEEN SIXTY-EIGHT AND ON A BROADER SCALE IN NINETEEN SEVENTY-TWO. BUT THEN, THE TWO STATES SIGNED A SURPRISE PEACE ACCORD THAT CALLED FOR THEIR MERGER. NUMEROUS BILATERAL COMMISSIONS WERE ESTABLISHED TO COORDINATE UNITY PLANS. ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL TIES WERE ENHANCED, BUT AT THE POLITICAL LEVEL THE TWO STATES REMAINED FAR APART.

(OPT\_) THE INTRICATE AND COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH YEMEN CAN BE SEEN IN THE CAREERS OF SOME OF THE LEADERS OF THE TWO STATES. ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL FIGURES

IN THE ADEN GOVERNMENT IS NATIONAL FRONT SECRETARY GENERAL ABDEL FATTAH ISMAIL A FORMER SCHOOL TEACHER FROM NORTH YEMEN, WHO EMIGRATED TO THE SOUTH TO JOIN THE NATIONAL FRONT. ONE OF HIS CHIEF RIVALS DURING THE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT WAS ABDULLAH ASNAG, LEADER OF A RIVAL SOUTH YEMENI GROUP, WHO FLED ADEN WHEN THE NATIONAL FRONT CAME TO POWER AND IS NOW THE FOREIGN MINISTER OF NORTH YEMEN. (END OPT)

DESPITE THEIR PUBLIC COMMITMENT TO UNION, THERE ARE VAST POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE ADEN AND SAN'A GOVERNMENT'S. NORTH YEMEN IS GENERALLY VIEWED AS ONE OF THE MORE MODERATE ARAB STATES. SAN'A IS CLOSELY ALLIED WITH THE ARCH-CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT OF NEIGHBORING SAUDI ARABIA. SOUTH YEMEN'S GOVERNMENT, BY CONTRAST, IS ONE OF THE MOST RADICALLY LEFTIST ARAB REGIMES AND, PERHAPS, THE SOVIET UNION'S STAUNCHEST ALLY IN THE AREA. SOUTH YEMEN GRANTED MOSCOW NAVAL FACILITIES AT THE PORT OF ADEN AND WAS ONE OF ONLY A HANDFUL OF ARAB STATES TO OPENLY SUPPORT THE MASSIVE SOVIET-CUBAN INTERVENTION IN THE HORN OF AFRICA.

IF IS NOT YET CLEAR WHETHER EVENTS OF THE PAST FEW DAYS WILL LEAD TO ANY MAJOR POLICY SHIFTS BY EITHER GOVERNMENT, AND OBSERVERS ARE STILL STRUGGLING TO GAUGE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN ADEN AND SAN'A.

GH/PY